

Section I

Introduction and Planning Framework

Overview

The project focused on the preparation of a comprehensive master plan for Spring Lake Park Reserve. The process took into consideration past master plans for the park, the setting, recreational and educational needs of the region, and the natural and cultural resources of the park itself. The master plan establishes a vision for the park and provides the guidelines for its ecological management and physical development to appropriately accommodate public use. The plan is also a tool for many public presentations and preparing funding applications.

Although comprehensive, the master plan still remains dynamic. It should be viewed as firm enough to guide park improvements, yet flexible enough to change based on increased knowledge, experience and changing public needs as the plan is implemented.

Interrelationship with the Previous Master Plan

The last master plan for the park was completed in 1983. Although a number of the provisions of that master plan remain valid, changes in the park's recreational and educational demands and approaches to natural resource and cultural stewardship warranted a complete updating. As of the date of adoption of this plan, the past plans are no longer valid, except from a historical perspective.

Planning Framework

The planning framework provided structure to the process of updating the previous master plan. The framework consisted of a number of components:

- Public involvement
- Dakota County involvement
- Public agency involvement
- Planning process

Public and Dakota County Involvement

Given the notable interest in the future development and protection of Spring Lake Park Reserve, the general public and special interest groups were invited to participate in the planning process on a number of occasions. Through formal and informal meetings, the public had direct access to the consultant team and County staff. The public's input throughout the planning process proved very fruitful and strengthened the final plan.

In addition to general public involvement, the Dakota County Parks and Recreation Commission provided oversight of the planning process at critical points. Being familiar with local conditions, public demand for facilities, and the history of the park, Dakota County staff inherently played an instrumental role in the master planning process. Under the planning framework, the commission and staff specifically focused on the following key roles:

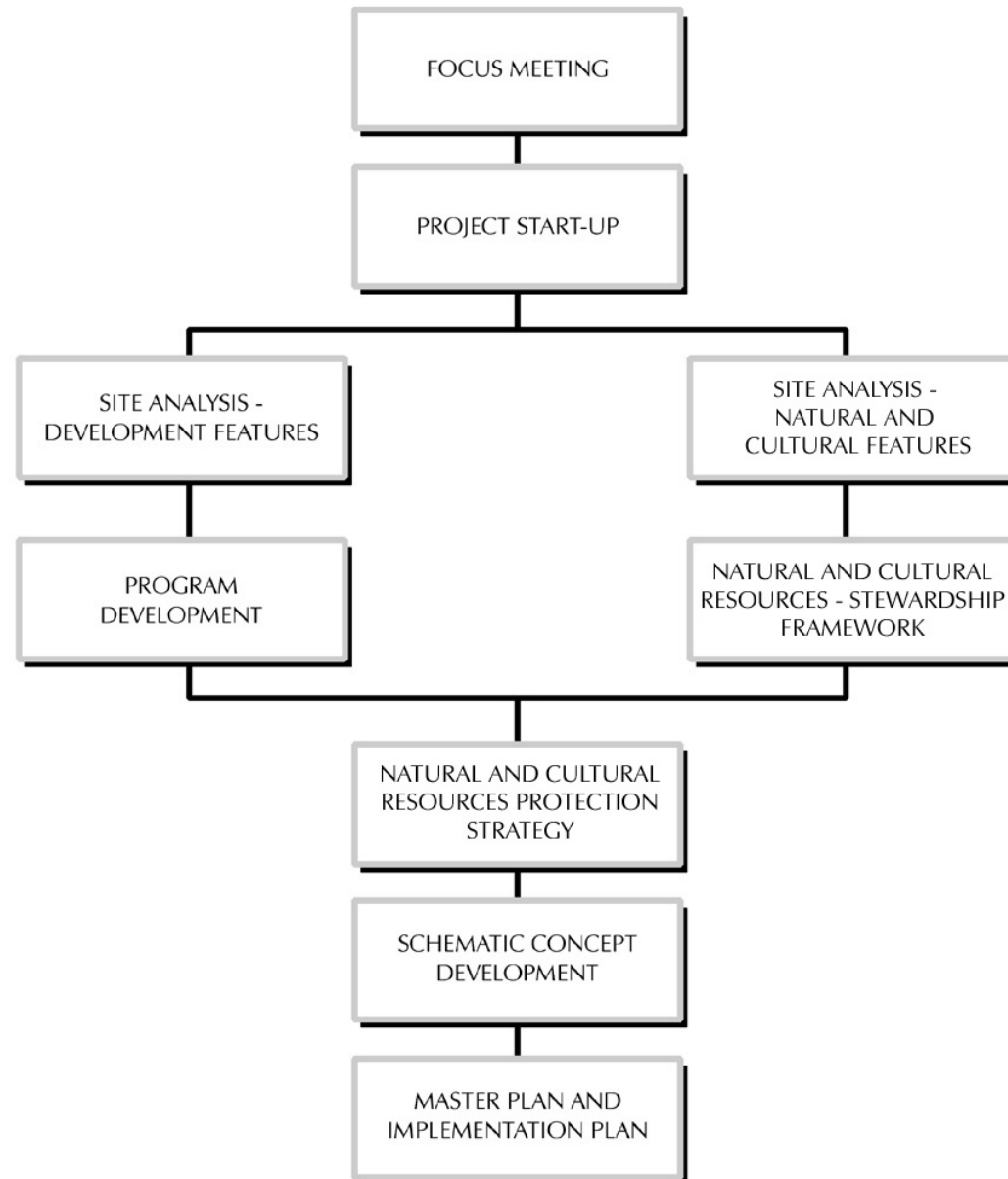
- ▶ Providing perspective and feedback on all planning issues.
- ▶ Reviewing and comment on all findings and master plan outcomes.
- ▶ Reaching consensus on a final master plan.

Public Agency Involvement

A variety of other public agencies that have been involved in various planning activities along the Mississippi River and Spring Lake were invited to participate in the planning process, as listed in the *Acknowledgments* section of the report. Representatives from these agencies participated in two planning charrettes that focused on ecological, cultural, and development issues. Their individual and collective input into the process proved valuable in determining the best course of action on complex planning issues.

Planning Process

The planning process followed a step-by-step procedure in which public participation was an integral part. The process was structured to allow for a series of internal checks and balances, which ensured that pertinent issues were considered and addressed in the proper sequence and with due diligence. It also ensured that ecological and cultural issues were kept at the forefront of all discussions and land use decisions. Figure 1.1 illustrates the key benchmark steps in the planning process.

Figure 1.1 - Key benchmark steps in the planning process.

Public involvement was integrated into the steps defined in figure 1.1. Key points of public involvement during the planning process include (in sequential order):

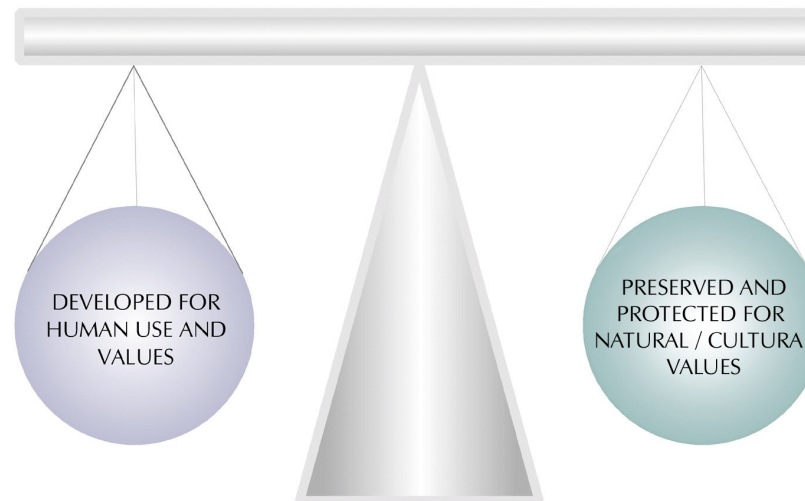
- 1) **Public Open House** – to take initial input on a variety of planning issues.
- 2) **Stakeholder Focus Group Meetings** – a series of meetings with specific interest groups, including youth groups, seniors, past event holders, sportsman, naturalists, trail users, and special area users.
- 3) **Ecological and Cultural Charrette** – a day-long work session that involved a variety of public agencies, non-profit groups, and individuals to develop an ecological and cultural vision for the park.
- 4) **Development Planning Charrette** – a day-long work session that involved a variety of public agencies, non-profit groups, and individuals to develop a development program for the park.
- 5) **Public Open House** – to review concepts for the park.
- 6) **Public Open House** – to review preliminary master plan for the park.

In addition to the above, a number of presentations were made to the Dakota County Parks and Recreation Commission and Dakota Board of Commissioners – Physical Development Committee. (Note that the overall project meeting schedule is defined in *Section II – General Park Background, Trends, and Public Process Findings*.)

Balancing Human Use and Ecological Protection

Finding the right balance between human use of the park and its ecological preservation and protection was critical to this project, as illustrated in figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 – Balancing human use and ecological/cultural preservation.



Since park reserves place significant emphasis on preserving ecological and cultural values, the planning process went to extensive lengths to ensure that the natural qualities historically present within the park would be preserved. In addition to its intrinsic values, stewardship of the park's natural landscape will also enrich the human, or cultural, experience for those visiting the park.

Given that the stewardship of the natural and cultural landscape is central to the park's vision, establishing its ecological and archaeological underpinnings was the first fundamental step in the planning process, as shown in figure 1.3. Once these were established, the physical development of the park for recreational and educational uses was considered, as defined by steps 2 and 3 in the illustration. Under this model, the planning strategy recognized the importance of the park in accommodating the public's expectation for pleasure, health, and well-being through the provision of recreational and educational facilities. At the same time, the ecological and cultural values of the site will be a central consideration in determining the type, extent, and location of these facilities.

Figure 1.3 – Ensuring that ecological and cultural values set the stage for human uses.

